

# Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) Austin

## 2017–2018 Evaluation Results Executive Summary

### Summary of Findings

GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) Austin is a federally funded grant program encouraging economically disadvantaged students and their families to have high educational expectations, graduate high school academically ready to enroll in college, and understand how to pay for postsecondary education. Awarded funding in late September 2017, the program's first federally funded year, GEAR UP Austin served a cohort of 6<sup>th</sup>-grade students across 11 middle schools and will follow this cohort to seven feeder high schools in the district for 7 years.

Although program implementation did not start until the Spring 2018 semester, the majority of students received support services relevant to college preparation. Evaluation findings based on this period of time suggested that students, teachers, and parents had a positive perspective on the role of the program services in college preparation.

#### *GEAR UP implementation outcomes for students included:*

- Eighty-four percent of GEAR UP students participated in one or more services.
- The majority of GEAR UP students reported college visits (71%), classroom visits (67%), tutoring (66%), and mentoring (60%) as helpful for college preparation.
- Seventy-seven percent of GEAR UP students reported that their facilitators were helpful in preparing them for college and career.
- The percentage of GEAR UP students who passed advanced courses was similar to that of non-GEAR UP students.

#### *GEAR UP implementation outcomes for teachers included:*

- Eighty-one percent of teachers at GEAR UP campuses were confident in their knowledge of how to help students meet their college and career goals.
- Teachers at GEAR UP campuses were perceived by the majority of students as supportive in preparing them for college and career.

#### *GEAR UP implementation outcomes for parents included:*

- Seventy-nine percent of GEAR UP students agreed that their parents helped them prepare for college and career.

- The majority of GEAR UP parents regarded college visits (74%), individual meetings with facilitators/counselors (64%), and parent workshops (63%) as most helpful in supporting them to prepare their child for college.



## Recommendations

Challenges associated with the GEAR UP implementation, along with the participants' positive perspectives on GEAR UP activities, inform some recommendations for program improvement.

**Increased understanding of the program.** Because the GEAR UP program started its implementation in February 2018, students and parents might not have known much about the program. As the program continues to reach parents, the program should help parents better understand its goals in the form of informational workshops, parent meetings, or video and print materials.

**More consistent data definition for service data tracking.** The program used the district's data system to track services each year. Ensuring a consistent understanding of the definition of each service is a critical step that may lead

to more effective implementation and evaluation of the program. Therefore, we recommend the program conduct periodical data check-ups to ensure all data is being entered, which would pave a path for effective reporting of the program's services.

**Increased opportunities for career exploration/job shadowing.** Students were in favor of field trips and stated that field trips helped them gain knowledge about college in a fun way. Given students' interest in talking to someone in real life and their desire to know more about college majors, it appears meaningful for students to go on field trips in which they can meet with people in different professions.

**More information about financial aid/scholarships.** Students expressed a desire to know more about financial aid/scholarships that would prepare them for college. Parents also suggested the program provide students with information about scholarships. Although financial aid/scholarship information sessions are prevalent at high school level, providing guidance to students and parents on financial planning at middle school level would be an effective strategy to motivate students to go to college.

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October 2018  
Publication 17.46